
CRISIS IN INDIA.

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WHY CONGRESS MUST DESIST



BY "OLD SALT"



EIGHT ANNAS.

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Introduction.

“ A brilliant and epigrammatic study of the present situation”, remarked Mr. George Slocombe, special correspondent of the “ Daily Herald ” on perusing this brochure in manuscript. One feels that no special introduction is necessary for a study of the present situation, since it is the subject of vehement controversy which leaves the public, unfortunately, none the wiser for the argument. In the study of Dynamics there is a conundrum about the clash between an irresistible force and an irremovable obstacle. No scientist has predicated the result of such a phenomenon; the picture is too bewildering for the visualisation of any result at all. No less bewildering is the present political conflict where people of goodwill are involved in hopeless antagonism and painful incidents are daily staged against a backscreen of tragic bitterness.

The author's analysis of the situation reveals dialectical skill of a high order; he captures the imagination of the most inexorable Nationalist by the postulate that the Civil Service is secretly in league against India's constitutional freedom. In all the pronouncements of Civilian spokesmen, there is one trait to be observed. They benevolently declare that all people, British and Indian, pursue the same ideal, namely, the peace and prosperity of India. Peace and prosperity are blessings they themselves claim to be adept at evolving, but they religiously fight shy of the expression the "freedom of India" which alone captivates the intelligentsia. If we examine the speeches of pioneer Congressmen, we constantly come across the tearful plea that India deserved sympathetic treatment at the hands of Britain. Those accents belong to the past, and we shall never hear them again. The writer of the following pages reverts to this changed mentality

of Indians whenever he concentrates his argument on the need of an Indo-British settlement in terms not of charity but of straightforward negotiations. The Civil Service may be a trade union of vested interests, and in spite of the severe strictures of the writer, the Civil Service has to-day within it a greater spirit of flexible adjustment than is recognised by an incredulous public. A corporation has neither a body to be kicked nor a soul to be damned, and the Civilian will manage to survive censure on the system.:

There is a corresponding change in the attitude of non-official Europeans. Violent diatribes against "agitators", threats of reconquest, hints of adult mobilisation—these are to day conspicuous by their absence, as contrasted with war-whoops of Sir Robert Watson-Smythe after the Dyer episode. Like the Civilian, the European non-official realises that Government

without the consent of the people is as a house built on the sands of moral bankruptcy; he can appreciate the meaning of Indians who say that they would like to be masters in their own house. The old type of the Anglo-Indian Colonel, breathing pepper and fire, has passed into the realms of comic legend. Some do writhe inwardly that the old days are gone, but the European in India, official and non-official, has been educated into the idea of settlement after free discussion, as distinguished from dictation. The writer urges his case with a cogency and rhetorical measure which alone make it pleasant reading.

The Round Table Conference supersedes the Simon Commission's Report which, on account of the boycott and the lack of advice from the Indian side, remains an *ex-parte* finding. Appellate jurisdiction vests in the Round Table Conference. The Simon Report will have

no more bearing on the Indian situation than Sir Leslie Scott's opinion on Indian States has had on the peace and comfort of our Princes. One feels that the lawyers who intervened in the Indian problem have made a mess of it. In the Royal Commission affair, there were three lawyers, all men of bloodless culture, applying their acumen to the grievances of India. Lord Reading proposed Lord Birkenhead ordered and Sir John Simon performed the thankless task. They have, so to speak, landed a lot of impedimenta and invoices, but the goods are difficult to clear. Now the job has passed from eminent lawyers famous for their cynicism and special pleading, into the hands of statesmen of human sympathy like Lord Irwin and Mr. Benn. The change is for the better, and in spite of all the treacherous miasma of fleeting events, one feels that problems will be better solved by human understanding than forensic expositions. At

any rate, the writer of this brochure has, in arresting manner, pursued a line of thought which it behoves every Indian to examine. There is no loading of the book with extracts; it speaks for itself. With all the views of the writer, one need not agree, but his main argument cannot be dismissed, for the simple reason that it is urged with the support of demonstrable facts and developed in convincing language. Brochures like this, periodically published, will be of immense use in clearing the air and letting the light of truth shine on problems darkened by acrimonious discussion.

Y. G.



I.

Politics in India has during the last ten years moved like a treadmill. Having turned full circle, it leaves us practically where we were in 1920. The actual fight in the country is between the people and the Civil Service; only when the hand of the Civil Service is numbed, and thereby the passing of the sceptre hastened, can authority be seized by Indians. Anyone who assists India in the transfer of power is a friend of India, while those who create circumstances enabling the Civil Service to assert itself in the name of public safety are delaying the day of freedom. That the Civil Service regime has survived its usefulness, intelligent Civilians themselves have come to realise. The Home Member can be made to admit it. Centralised authority is valuable during a period of consolidation; but the period of external consolidation in India passed long ago and yet the system lingers in a process of septic fossilisation.

Without questioning the merits of Satyagraha as a political force or its ultimate inevitability as a world cult one can adduce convincing reasons to show that the present Civil Disobedience campaign is ill-timed, chiefly because it tends to rejuvenate the Civil Service at a moment when statesmen in higher authority are keenly alive to the wrongs of official despotism and are devising practical means to subordinate the Services to the discipline of Representative Government. To throw political conditions in the country into a state of flux is to re-invite the Civil Service to tighten its hold in the name of law and order. And the policy impairs the prospect, which is none too illusory, of neutralising the pretensions of the Civil Service through the medium of a public test offered by friendly statesmen.

Now, the mention of friendly statesmen provokes the Congressman into the facile taunt

that none exists. We have no desire to exalt either Lord Irwin or Mr. Wedgwood Benn to realms of saviourship, but we do hold that it would be, even at the worst, a political advantage to utilise the method of direct negotiations with the British Government, and in the event of failure, to intensify public agitation in support of a nationwide campaign for Swaraj. The precept "Agree with thine adversary quickly" has more than scriptural authority about it, because if our cause is just and we are baulked by deceit, the fact of prior negotiations must generate a valuable spring of moral energy to prosecute campaigns for the winning of rights denied in spite of argument.

II.

The history of political agitation in India has been a long chapter of ineffective petitions. The British Government knows it; and now we are at a new stage of attempting to settle differences by open negotiations. We have had debates in the Legislatures, solemn memorials, historic remonstrances, all voiced on the assumption of Britain's sincerity and suzerainty. Granting they failed, it is nothing short of impatient prevarication to contend that the scheme of an open Conference is but another chimera set to waste our time and defer the day of deliverance. A few months can matter little in the tidal move of Indian history through centuries, but to lose the chance of a new experiment, over a few months, on the plea of instant Swaraj, is to betray a cultivated temper

of cynical evasion in order to suit the argument that British *mala fides* alone have prompted Lord Irwin to offer a Conference, which apparently we do not have even courage enough to test. In Hindi the word *kal* impartially stands for yesterday as well as to-morrow, so strangely indifferent are we to the undulations of time. If it is a Machiavellian motive, Indians have before them a unique opportunity of proclaiming from a world platform the significance of the exposure. If the Conference is a success, then we shall as if by a miracle be saved from the agony of a harrowing struggle. If on the other hand we fail, we shall have lost nothing but gained something in the way of moral impetus and world publicity to renew the fight. The alternatives are worth infinitely more than the lapse of a few months; and let the truth be told that the ordinary villager who

is ultimately concerned in the struggle will be far more grateful for the chance of a measured treaty than the travail of precipitate strife. The excuse about lost time and the simile about the country 'being at its last gasp to permit of a moment's delay, are out of place when the peace of three hundred and fifty millions is involved.

The Congress should desist.

III.

Apart from the incongruity of now conducting the Civil Disobedience campaign in point of time, we have to consider the slender influences that make for unity at the present moment. In 1919, there were three marked forces to maintain the drive behind Mahatma Gandhi's ill-fated experiment. The whole country was under the thrill of Jallianwallah-bagh and the Martial Law excesses of the Punjab. A series of occurrences constituted a specific grievance and people were swayed by a universal sentiment. It was not, let it be remembered, the cumulative indictment of British Rule that sustained the agitation, not the eleven points of Mahatma Gandhi now strung together, but the revulsion caused by a particular class of incidents that stimulated the movement. There is no parallel incentive at present to support popular enthusiasm; the Eleven Points are as

old as the hills and can be doubled into twenty two without a corresponding impetus. Secondly, Mahatma Gandhi moved on the crest of the Muslim feeling that surged from the Khilafat grievance. Muslims, educated and illiterate, were lamenting the fate of Turkey and were denouncing Britain as an untrustworthy Muslim Power. The need for a pact between Hindus and Muslims as to the eventual distribution of power was overwhelmed by the popular paroxysm of an understood alliance; and the movement proceeded automatically, with fresh stimulus derived from the incidents of the agitation itself. Now the second experiment of Civil Disobedience is launched on the troubled waters of communal dissension. A pact was attempted at Madras; it was scrapped by the Nehru Report; it has since been said to have lapsed. The controversy that followed the adoption of the Nehru Report disclosed deep fissures in the fabric of unity. And despite

the diplomatic commendation of the movement by the "Jamiat", Muslims are not inspired by the sentiment of confidence so essential to corporate action. Why indeed Civil Disobedience should have been launched before a compromise was reached with the Muslims, remains a baffling mystery. It is a tragic mistake. "Produce your scheme", said Lord Birkenhead; it remains an unanswered challenge. The moment Hindus and Muslims agree to compose their differences in the future constitution of India, three-fourths of the Indian problem is solved. Several attempts were made, but at the critical time and when further efforts were imperative, Mahatma Gandhi turned his back on the difficulty and went straight for Civil Disobedience as if that problem had never existed at all. Responsible Muslims were surprised at his abrupt dismissal of negotiations which it was the primary duty of every Indian patriot to complete. In 1920, the attempt of

Civil Disobedience was like a race on two legs; now it is a hop on one foot. Mahatma Gandhi, no doubt, has since cryptically declared that he would give the Muslims all they wanted. The prospect of a blank cheque appalled Doctor Moonji who protested, albeit in meek tones befitting the atmosphere of the Salt tax Satyagraha. Of the disaffection incipient among other minorities we do not speak, but it is certainly astounding that Mahatma Gandhi opened his broadsides at Government before securing any fusion of sentiment and interests which the All Parties' Conference sought to obtain. This disparity between the campaigns of 1920 and 1930 alone is a fatal factor.

Nor should it be forgotten that in 1920, there was a fine temper of post-war enthusiasm together with the material resources of war-time prosperity to ensure swinging strides. A crore of rupees was wanted; and more than a crore was

poured out and lost through the sieves of multiple enterprise. Now we are passing through the morass of economic depression and world-wide slump when it is the duty of statesmen and patriots to husband the meagre resources of national livelihood instead of arresting production through turmoil. The popular comment is that Government policy has debilitated Indian capacity, but the point is that the Second Satyagraha movement has been launched at a time when objective aids to success have reached the lowest of low levels. While fasting is good for diseased individuals, economic fasts in the shape of hartals cause much waste of tissue in the body politic. Bombay, once our industrial capital, is nearly our industrial crematorium.

That a man of the realistic genius of Mahatma Gandhi should in his zeal have so befogged himself as to become blind to the weakness of national organisation before an open fight,

is an indication of the frenzy actuating his "Mad risk". To attempt to bring the Government on its knees before the different communities are ranged firm on their own legs is a hazardous venture. It would have taken more time and indefatigable goodwill to have pursued the course of voluntary settlement. But such an achievement remains indispensable. Mahatma Gandhi in seeking his short-cut at Dandhi, has started before time. The longest way round is often the shortest way home.

IV.

If in contrast with 1920, the atmosphere is now unfavourable to Civil Disobedience and other courses of Non-Cooperation, the apologist of Mahatma Gandhi argues that he leads a more disciplined following. His picked men are, it may be granted, incapable of violence, but India is a country of teeming millions where the ordinary individual is not yet cured of human traits. The non-violent man is a superlative phenomenon evolved in the hot house atmosphere of 'Ashrams and ascetics'. We have to deal with the normal human being, with his instincts of possession and transient emotions. If all Indians were self-purified and freed from common emotions, India would be very Heaven and Swaraj a dispensation of vulgar externality of little consequence to the purified soul. When Swaraj is actually attained as in the mundane experiences of other countries, we shall have myriads of

ordinary men to control, thieves and drunkards to check. That is what Swaraj is for. The existence of a number of reformed men and women is no guarantee against the insurgence of primitive passions among millions of people. There is another point to note. In 1920, the programme was simpler. Today the Satyagrahi has to attempt "raids" on the plea that certain "national properties" should be captured. The raid of these national properties—it may be a salt depôt today or the currency office tomorrow—costs muscular exertion much above the pacific strain of 1920. The non-violent vow of a few thousands of recruits is no safety-valve when hordes of people will have eventually to be brought into the fray. This point has to be stressed because the superior quality claimed for recruits from the Ashram will prove to be an insignificant counterpoise against the standard conduct of the ordinary man when he finds

himself in the skirmish of Civil Disobedience. We had in 1920, no less than 50,000 people in jail, many of whom were wedded to non-violence. Non-violence, by the way, is itself an overrated virtue often mistaken for the inertia fostered in subject races. The non-violent patriot who is worth counting, is the man who possesses physical courage but prefers not to hit back. The Moplah of Malabar and the Gurkha of Nepal can be healthily educated into the creed of non-violence, because he subdues his innate instinct of force and chooses to be pacific. Much of the non-violence we see is the reflection of comfortable lassitude. That apart, the argument about the superb characteristics of the present-day "Ironsides" is not very much of a security as compared with the recruits of 1920, because the danger of animal spirits and retaliation lurks in the multitude who are not tangibly affected, so huge as they,

by the hallowing influence of a thousand Ashrams. But Bardoli? Yes, Bardoli, Kaira, Champaran, Tarkeshwar, and more if you like. Bardoli, for instance, fought a neat little fight to redress a neat little grievance, a concrete grievance understood by the people of the talukar a specific grievance hourly felt by the people with no fanfaronade about it to lend it reality. There were village Hampdens on the scene; but be it remembered that the fight was confined to a locality and related to a particular grievance. A man is spontaneously inspired into fighting for a village well or a village panchayat, while he is tepid about the League of Nations notwithstanding the superior importance of the latter. The most impassioned fight of Mr. Lloyd George was over a village churchyard when he was young, though no one questions his arduor in the Great World War. A no-tax campaign is feasible over a limited area in the

stress of a local grievance. There is no super-regional idealism about it and people put up a fight without the assistance of strangers to promote or preside over the struggle. On the other hand, to keep seven million villages rocking in rage over the familiar issue of military expenditure or costly salt would be asking for trouble, because they do not feel the actual impact of the grievance, nor are they excruciated by any sense of iniquity. Archimedes in discussing the marvel of the lever, said that a child could move the earth provided the beam was long enough and rested on a fulcrum near the globe. Theoretically it is possible. Similarly we can visualise a universal scheme of Satyagraha embracing all villages in India, but to be anywhere near that ideal the people should be taught to feel a common interest. The idea of settling the Indo-British dispute by free discussion can certainly be made intelligible to them, and the sooner and the more they know of it, the greater

would their enthusiasm be to fight the matter out if—*permitting ourselves to be pessimistic*—the Round Table Conference proved to be a mere booby-trap set for Indian politicians. But surely the offer must be tested before condemning it: and there is no reason why a Gentlemen's Agreement should not materialise if both sides assume the existence of mutual gentlemanliness and goodwill. If India is tired of petitions, she can hardly be tired of Round Table Conferences, for the simple reason she has never tried one.

V.

Despisers of the Round Table Conference have probably forgotten how a similar, if a smaller, scheme was wrecked in 1922 when Lord Reading suggested a Conference. Then Non-Cooperation was at its zenith. Indian leaders of all schools of thought met at a preliminary conference in Bombay with Mahatma Gandhi as the pivotal personality. Lord Reading had then made one stipulation, namely, that the recruiting and mobilising of volunteers to prosecute Civil Disobedience should be held in abeyance. A truce implies, and then also it did imply, the suspension of hostilities and naturally no reasonable man could have had any ground to cavil at the request of the Government that Mahatma Gandhi should refrain from his volunteer-manoeuvres, in view of the proposed conversations. But Mahatma Gandhi declined. And to make a long story short, the Conference

never met and the struggle was renewed in the open. The sequel of disintegration and disaster and paralytic lethargy that resulted is too well known to need recapitulation. Indeed no Indian politician has ever been heard to argue that the decision was fortunate for India. On the other hand, many deplored it as an act of political sabotage, and let it be admitted that in sober recollection it was really one of the few great opportunities which India ought never to have missed.

It was an ephemeral triumph; the Mahatma perhaps won the game, but he did lose the rubber. Today he with tragic consistency is repeating the same mistake. We have but a limited fund of moral energy to dissipate; and in spite of all the belligerent trappings of Salt Satyagraha, Mahatma Gandhi is sacrificing a superior opportunity and that for a second time of asking. What should have been a warning appears to be treated by him as an example, and

the policy of Round Table negotiations stands as an untried experiment. Also let it be remembered of Congressmen in the Legislatures, that the proposal of a Round Table Conference became one of the hardy annuals of the Congress-Swaraj party in the Assembly. Therefore, are we right in condemning the idea of the Round Table Conference ? Scores of laws might be tumultuously broken, but at the end of the "melee", we shall whether we like it or no, have to be at a Round Table Conference which is :nothing more or less than the settling of the terms of peace by negotiation. You cannot eternally dodge the inevitable.

VI

Can peace be indefinitely kept in face of provocations ? Circumstances have pitted the police sepoy against the Satyagrahi. Wherever there is a disturbance, the blame is put on the policeman; as a general rule, he is supposed to act without restraint. Propaganda ascribes the aggression to him and exonerates the Satyagrahi whose convictions and costume save him from ugly accusations. Considering the scale on which authority is challenged and the means by which subversion is advocated, the police have shown great forbearance, even as the Satyagrahis have in the main observed non-violence. But the Satyagrahi has a large and non-descript following whose cheers exhilarate him but whose offences are disclaimed as something utterly foreign to the occasion caused by his own truculent activities. The policeman is a definite entity, while his tormentors are composed of unknown auxiliaries

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with the "Volunteer" in front preaching peace and inviting suffering. For the size of India and the disruptive manœuvres of non-co-operation, the police have been tolerant and cases of severity are too small for a dirge. Similarly, it must be said of the eruption of Gandhism, that the excesses daily attributed to it are not so great or serious as might have been expected in an experiment so sudden and cataclysmic as the overthrow of the British Empire in India. Chittagong is only a far-off tremor in an earthquake while the police offensive reported in Alipore Jail can be dismissed as a small whiff out of an undeveloped cyclone. Envisaging the things that the police and the people have not yet done but are perilously capable of doing, we must appreciate the passive features of what is argued to be a life and death struggle. This cannot last; if the retention of authority, even on the basis of terrorism, were the sole object of the Viceroy ra-

ther than the reconciliation of two countries, the Government could easily have adopted the see-saw methods of stern suppression and diplomatic cajolery which have functioned in such sweet alternation during the regime of certain successful Viceroys before Lord Irwin. Lord Irwin has been appealing to the better mind of India, though the course of events is being punctuated in red. And to those who make light of his restraint we would suggest some recollections of the past. In 1920, Aman Sabhas were sedulously promoted by Civilian satraps; and today with the vulgar distribution of patronage and some tactical corruption, it is possible to re-establish a net-work of sycophant reaction throughout the country. Lord Irwin has repressed the temptation, though knowing India as we do, the process might desiccate solid movements to atoms. Or again, is it impossible to hit at the tender spot of aristocratic nationalists

by sentencing people to pay for their offences in cash, rather than through the penance of detention in jail? The Hindu takes to the privations of Satyagraha with philosophic resignation; his body has resilient qualities, but when punishment takes the form of material forfeiture, the hurt goes home. Thanks to the moral scruples of Lord Irwin's regime, with which should be associated the name of a great gentleman and a sober patriot like Sir Brojendralal Mitter, the wages of defiance have never yet been allowed to manifest themselves in penalties that sting the sense of property; nor has the device of corruption been applied to a people peculiarly susceptible to the temptations of subjection. More. If it came to a fight with no cushions to throw at each other, we are brutal enough to conceive of the possibility of an unbridled executive themselves breaking the law to trap known agitators and then pursue the task of subjugation. "Who

tarted the row?" can remain mendaciously obscure. Britain might agree to the surrender of the Civil Service; she is not likely to be hood-winked or hooted out of her connection with India. Thanks to the ecstatic chase of visions, of pillars of smoke and columns of fire, Moses wasted 40 years in the desert, when after a prosaic survey of the road with eyes fixed on the earth, he might have accomplished the journey to Canaan in 'as many days.

Our moral stamina is not inexhaustible; our amenability to manipulated dissension is not less to-day than it was in the days of Mir Jaffar's treason; the esurience of the best of our political leaders (except perhaps a few like Jinnah and Gandhi who do not want any favours from Government) has come within the notice of the Civil Service at every session of the Assembly and the Council of State. If the Civil Service are let loose from the restraints

of Lord Irwin who has strenuously curbed them to the limit, of spurning threats of mass resignation, the result would be a setting back of the hands of the clock. For the problem is not that of a compact locality like Bardoli or a small country like Holland; it is India, a congeries of people who can still—thanks to their disunity—be bullied and shuffled and sold about like sheep which have neither shepherds nor watchdogs. At the time of the last non-cooperation movement, Sir Malcolm Hailey said that there was no difficulty in maintaining authority in the country; only, officials might have to suffer some discomfort proportionate to their sense of leniency. This downright facing of the facts does not mean flunkeyism or cowardice but a plain reading of forces that cannot be ignored. “An Empire won by the breach of the Ten Commandments cannot be held by the Sermon on the Mount”. That is a dictum for Lord Irwin

to ponder. "A country steeped in superstition and held by the force of disunion can never be stirred by ascetic incantations." This is the lesson Mahatma Gandhi has still to learn. As long as Hindus and Muslims fight, the British need not bother to draw a pistol; the moment they cease fighting, hope gleams on the horizon. Will not Mahatma Gandhi, who has descended from his oracular tripod to the mire of the salt pan, now at least admit that peace during all these demonstrations might be a thing that exists only on sufferance? What exists on sufferance is bound to cease on opposition.

VII.

Look at the map of India; picture to yourself the diversity of its peoples, the density of ignorance occasioned, we admit, by the apathy of the Civil Service regime; but do realise the tremendous proposition made that the British should be coerced out of authority even without the respectable excuse of an agreed programme of recession. If deception be our fate at the Round Table Conference let us openly obtain the momentum of disillusionment and forge ahead with the support of a people previously educated in the purport of Round Table negotiations.

Supposing Parliament sanctions India a liberalised constitution short of *Purna Swaraj*, are we sure that the experience of 1923 will not recur? Then the condemned Legislatures had been, after a short period of boycott, re-captured by Congressmen of ironside quality. "Fight

in the citadel " and " Fight from within " became the sommersault formula. Our leaders are so learned that they can be easily sophisticated. We venture to predict another transition as at Gaya favouring re-entry into Legislatures that exist, in order to carry the fight into the "enemy's camp". The cyclic rhythm of experience and, we add, natural prudence, tells us that re-entry into Councils that might function for purposes short of isolated independence, will again prove fascinating enough to Congressmen who now swear by Satyagraha. A nation cannot be continuously maintained at fever-heat, and a band of constructive politicians will as before come from the material gaily absorbed into jails at present. That will not mean any conscious act of betrayal but an expression of the ambitions and patriotic instincts natural to the citizens of a country. " This too shall pass ". Meanwhile does it not stand to reason that Indians should for the first

time accept the challenge of a Conference and if need be, publicly dispose of all its latent temptation by the test of actual experience? Britain wants her alliance with India to continue, and we do not think that if Indian statesmen show courage and unity at the right moment, the Civil Service would be able to put down the national movement and succeed in perpetuating its own supremacy.

VIII.

Mr. Montagu in attempting to curb the Civil Service was overwhelmed by the landslide of non-cooperation. He died a broken man, when two years more by him at the India Office might have gone far to depose the Civilian autocrat in favour of Ministers trusted by Indians and proved trustworthy by their own courageous deeds. Tragedy supervened. Will now the partnership of Lord Irwin and Mr. Wedgwood Benn be buried in the same disaster of Indian non-cooperation? They are not sacred personalities, but their offer suggests an approach the like of which was only conceived but never before won by Indian politicians. Shall we wreck their scheme without giving them a sporting chance, a chance that might enable us to infuse into politics those forces of communal cohesion without which we must continue to be the drag and reproach of the world?

What proof is there that the Round Table Conference would discuss problems on a scale necessitated by Indian conditions? How do we know if Dominion Status would not be ruled out by Lord Irwin? He, it is true, returned to India with the none too revolutionary interpretation that the pronouncement of August 20th indicated that the natural issue of Indian progress was Dominion Status. We ask the Satyagrahic nihilist what there is in the statement to sterilise the claim at the Round Table Conference that the question to be discussed should be Dominion Status such as is feasible in India. Beyond the summoning of a Round Table Conference, Lord Irwin could do nothing. And nothing more specific is required if Indian politicians go to exercise their rights of self-determination implicit in the professions of Britain. When the Conference meets, the agenda would be a matter for the Conference

to determine. Whether it is Dominion Status or Complete Independence or supremacy over Great Britain or the overlordship of the World or the hegemony of the Solar System, Indian representatives are free to urge their claim. Suspicion dissolves in the atmosphere of common sense. Once we are united in India, nothing can defeat us abroad. Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Motilal Nehru misunderstood this position and showed an attitude of abnormal distrust. They stipulated certain terms of reference for the Conference, tantamount to the Viceroy's committal to a particular course even before the people of India could agree on a workable scheme. With the sessions of their All Parties Conference in a chronic state of adjourned drift and with the voice of smaller minorities in a state of audible militancy, it

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would have been preposterous for Lord Irwin, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, to have tied himself to any specific formula. As far as the Round Table Conference was concerned, Lord Irwin stood for free will, while Mahatma Gandhi stood for pre-destination.

IX.

By his premature plunge into Satyagraha Mahatma Gandhi has jeopardised a great opportunity not of acquiring a couple of extra ministers in the provinces or a couple of additional portfolios in the Central Government but of launching a worldwide campaign for the liberation of the Indian nation on terms of freedom as joyously understood by Dominions no less independent in their spirit than India. The right and statesmanlike course would have been to take Lord Irwin at his word, summoned a Convention, settled the terms of communal unity and turned round on the British Government to accept the chosen delegates and plenipotentiaries of India for the Conference in London. Thus with the Indian delegation compact and complete, Mahatma Gandhi should have propounded the claims of India before the Round Table Conference. Instead of embar-

passing the Viceroy with the proposition of prior theories, he should have mobilised all the forces of unity and approached His Majesty's Government regardless of all Civil Service reaction. There he should have stood for his sixteen annas in the rupee and evaluated the position of India in the scales of world-policy or world-convenience.

We do not like the phrase "World-convenience", but we cannot escape its necessary implication by coining another term. The point is that an Indian delegation should have argued its case, weighed all considerations against it, and then urged a solution advantageous to India. The Sovereign Corporation, the Indian Civil Service, would, of course, have been compelled to take up its position of ministerial service, and India could have fought for the principle of democratic authority and a removeable executive. It would not have been like a Nabha or a Patiala

enquiry within closed doors, but an investigation with the fierce blaze of world publicity shining upon the scene.

India has, after all, the bigger case because she has to release herself from the shackles of a foreign bureaucracy, a case practically conceded in the policy of Lord Irwin and Mr. Wedgwood Benn. If vested interests proved adamant and failure ensued, it would be, we repeat, the business of the Indian delegation to retire from the Conference and carry on a world propaganda in vindication of India. Even if the Indian delegation returned empty handed, there would have been nothing lost. Even if the ultra-extremists of India jeered at the delegation, the ordeal would have been useful for the renewal of the fight in the confidence that millions would support the leaders of a cause but momentarily lost. Mahatma Gandhi then might have proposed a world tour far transcending in

its effect, the lyrical missions of Tagore and Mrs. Naidu put together in the United States of America. Nothing then could prevent him from carrying the fiery cross through continents and returning to India, firmly wedded, for the last crusade of Indian freedom.

But Mahatma Gandhi burnt his boats and set out for Jalalpur and initiated a fresh debacle with its sudden excursions in the name of salt, open breaches of the law, incidental violence among uneducated mobs, the provocation of force and the callous destruction of a scheme of goodwill tendered by Britain. Even if a thousand towns were swept off in the trial of Satyagrahic typhoons, solemnly regretted by Satyagrahis, the British Government would, as things stand, be able to enforce its authority with the aid of force and if they so please stigmatise the violence of the people in terms never even dreamt of by them. Why should we so erratically hand

ourselves and our moral prestige to the bureaucratic henchmen of the Government who can play their own game better than us, just at the moment when the test of argument is placed, providentially, as our supreme opportunity? In ethical issues Mahatma Gandhi is invariably right, but here he is passing back to the Civil Service the paramountcy which India has to wring out for herself, with the aid of friends of the purposeful personality and moral calibre Lord Irwin. The problem is not one of mordant ethics but shrewd politics.

X

Constant reference to the story of 1920 may be irksome to the reader; the Youth League volunteer of today might feel that the drawing of comparisons is an idle pastime and look upon the old policy as an antiquated foible natural to the crude pioneers of non-cooperation. The policy is nevertheless the same and will remain as an article of dogmatic faith in the Manuals of Satyagraha. But the volunteer of 1930 apparently knows better, though his predecessors in the struggle had to fight their way through harder opposition. The present writer knows intimately the earlier band of Ironsides who were in 1920 acquainted with the griefs of Satyagraha, who had endured the throes and tears of the movement that dissolved at Chauri Chaura. The prospect is the same. What appals one is not the probable loss of lives (India can easily spare thousands if there is profit in the sacrifice) and

the repetition of the agony in a struggle with a real chance, but the folly of courting tragedy when there is an opportunity of pacific settlement.

For the first time in the history of political agitation we have the phenomenon of a Conservative Viceroy co-operating with a Labour Government to secure a solution of the Indian problem that will bear scrutiny and entail no scandal. Lord Irwin's selflessness and personal prestige are not assets to be hastily discarded, because they provide an advantageous position for shrewd Indian patriots to take up. The control of India through the agency of a well-organised Civil Service is not an impossible problem for Britain, in spite of all the irritating political grimaces exhibited in the practice of Civil Disobedience and boycotts.

A word should be said of the limitations of boycotts. Commercial boycotts however

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spectacular and temporarily damaging have never shown continuous strength in any country, and hartals are bound to slacken like an overworn elastic with no kick in it. The boycott temper is just useful for casual advantages; to secure its true worth we shall require the annexation of political power by other means. The theory of economic boycott in India is as old as the doctrines of Ranade and the preachings of Gokhale. The movement has progressed in spiral fashion without any finality about it for the reason that enduring Swadeshi is but an adjunct and a feature of political Swaraj achieved by political means. Faith in boycott as a means of national deliverance is a phase of mental intoxication in the life of every one who thinks deeply on the problem of subjection; but as sure as monsoon follows Indian Summer, the fervour weakens itself beyond recognition. Boycott of goods is a manifestation of high temper, but high temper never

lasts. With the reopening of schools and colleges and the downpour of the monsoon, we shall have fewer processional manœuvres and less enthusiasm in the way of contraband salt. And let it be remembered that the building up of industries is the result only of normal processes that make fevered repudiations unnecessary. He who trusts in boycott demonstrations as a means of political emancipation has not understood the incidence and outcome of past boycotts. Boycott to the Britisher is an exasperating nuisance, but his stake in the market and the basic tenure of his political power are adequate enough to instil in him the kind of patience which has safeguarded his trade even in worse times. We mention the limitations of street corner harangues about boycott, because some leaders treat it as *per se* calamitous to Britain. We wish that the theory of needle-thrust boycotts in subject countries were true

but it has in experience proved to be a gaseous presumption.

Digression apart, Indian leaders have miscalculated the unique advantages of having a Conservative Viceroy seeking peace under the aegis of a Labour Government and supported by a tenacious idealist like Mr. Benn. It is a pity that the Round Table Conference is indirectly attacked by arguments of gratuitous despair; its value can be put to the test if the Congress will but desist.

XI.

There was nothing solemn in the stroke of twelve on 31st of December, 1929; but Mahatma Gandhi promptly enveloped himself in the task of Civil Disobedience, not because of his proclaimed hope of Dominion Status at that hour, but because of the pressure of certain commitments on the part of his political associates. When the biography of Mahatma Gandhi is ultimately written, much will have to be said about impetuous steps caused in his career by personal attachments. It is a great and human trait, the faculty of special friendships. It is indeed a characteristic feature of moral giants of the stature of Mahatma Gandhi that individual relationships sometimes fascinate them into the loyal acceptance of unanticipated hazards. Morley, though a pacific philosopher, had an intense and ill-concealed admiration for men of action. He dwelt on the edifying example of Carlyle in his trance over Cromwell. Voltaire, the penman, sneakingly, worshipped the swordsman in the person of Frederick the Great. Mahatma Gandhi was.

always swayed by the vicissitudes of the Nehru family. The pacifist loved the breed of executive severity. That is why perhaps at the Gaya Congress he yielded more to Pandit Motilal Nehru than C. R. Das when he agreed to the entry of Congressmen in the Legislatures. He then left the stage for the convenience of Pandit Motilal. Though he knew all about the Legislatures, Mahatma Gandhi in December of 1929 was galvanised into a new condemnation, because Pandit Motilal appeared at Lahore with the tattered confession that the Legislatures were a demoralising sham. He invested the avowal with the pride of a novel discovery, and in spite of the protest of Congressmen familiar with the jaded theory of Council "hallucinations", Mahatma Gandhi treated this report from Pandit Motilal as a revelation warranting a radical departure after eight years of collusive assent. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the illustrious firebrand was out for a policy fatal to all pourparlers and conferences ancillary to the goal of Dominion Status. Pandit Motilal, the spiritual godson of the Congress President, followed the lead, and

Mahatma Gandhi was then, by the token of sentiment, tied down to a shattering programme worthy of Jawaharlal's Messianic fervour. The idea of Hindu-Muslim settlement was lost in the wash of personal devotion and enthusiasm. Such is the real truth of Mahatma Gandhi's transformation in the last week of December, that is a few days after his sedate confession that he could not yet see Civil Disobedience even on the distant horizon. The inevitable happened.

At the interview of Pandit Motilal and Mahatma Gandhi with Lord Irwin, the two leaders stuck firmly to certain preconceptions compelling and accelerating their departure straight from the Viceroy's House to the Congress Pandal at Lahore. The Viceroy, however, in defiance of craven counsel from the Civil Service, was there ready to declare amnesty for a hundred conspicuous political leaders in jail, if such were the claim of Mahatma Gandhi. He was prepared to yield to Mahatma Gandhi and the Pandit to the utmost for the sake of peace when these interviewers demanded the condition—some say a

written undertaking—that Lord Irwin should predicate the conclusion of the future Round Table Conference as Dominion Status. The Viceroy, naturally, was taken aback. The object of a free Conference is to settle upon an acceptable solution; and therefore rightly Lord Irwin expressed his inability to predetermine the findings of the Conference. And who would today challenge his goodwill or question his statesmanship on the score that he did not instantly sit down and sign away the existing connection between India and England to please his visitors?

Lord Irwin did nothing monstrous in not yielding to the demand of the Mahatma. Indian delegates at the Conference were free to profess any aims they liked; they were free to suggest the substance of the agenda; they had an equal voice to demand either more, or less, than the scope of Dominion Status; there was nothing to prevent their withdrawal in the event of disappointment. In these circumstances Lord Irwin pleaded that no one could prejudge the outcome of a Conference consisting of free delegates to

obtain a lasting settlement. It was a monumental error, if not a crime against India, that the two Congress leaders should have obdurately demanded a prophetic recital of the findings of a Conference that was yet to meet. We ask if it is high policy or sound judgment to torpedo the prospect of dignified negotiations because the results of an unexamined case have still to be ascertained through free discussion. Had the Viceroy stood for something palpably unreasonable, Congressmen would have made the welkin ring with shouts about his bad faith. They are now significantly silent about the story of the Conference at Delhi that broke through the virulent opposition, by proxy, of Pandit Jawaherlal who had already risked his career on his peculiar adventure of millennial freedom for India.

XII

The Civil Disobedience movement has slid fast as if on an inclined plane. The outlook is dismal. But considering the haste with which Satyagraha was started as if to supersede the possibility of the Round Table Conference, we think that a plea for the reasoned approach of the problem will appeal to many Indian political leaders who mean well by their country. Disruptive campaigns before the issue of the Round Table Conference are likely to ensure the rehabilitation of the Civil Service, as indeed current events signify. There is a spurious, if delectable, feeling abroad that the people of Europe and America are in a state of enthusiastic laudation about the Civil Disobedience movement. They are only interested in the novelty and paraphernalia of Mahatma Gandhi's ascetic experiments, but when it comes to the triumph of Asiatic consciousness, they are sure to curb their sympathy.

The secret belief is cherished that Britain will quail before the odium of repression in India and out of very shame will excel the philanthropy of America in the Philippines ! It is but a morbid speculation when actually every country has got enough of its own business to do and much to apologise for. The freak-interest taken by some non-conformist divine in Philadelphia may be a subject of journalistic stunts, but it is of no more potential value to us than the placarding of excesses in Texas by us can be of practical advantage to the hunted negro. The officious Frenchman will desist when reminded of Morocco; the patronising Italian will sit up if you whisper Tripoli; the effusive Jap will turn taciturn at the mention of Korea. They have all their own problems and their interest in us does not go above the limits of a spectator's comment or a passing chuckle.

We have to settle this business with Britain direct. There is the prospect and the offer of open negotiations. There is the unique fact of two sincere and courageous statesmen commanding the confidence of all parties in England, and committed to a procedure never before presented for the solution of the Indian problem. The Civil Disobedience movement of Mahatma Gandhi has come as a set-back to the country and a providential chance for the Civil Service to assert once again its power.

The Congress must desist. There is time yet to save the opportunity, if only the people realise the ruin counted by leaders in their name. Mahatma Gandhi is in a frenzied mood, a mood that enables him to survey the sufferings of his followers and say "When our hands and feet are cut off, then we can sing". That is the strain of unheard melodies, far above the key of endurable music. The attitude is no reflexion

of the Indian mind which freed from the mist of sentiment will see the way of freedom, if possible, by negotiations.

About Mahatma Gandhi's activities. one must admit that impartially viewed, they show that as far as British Government in India is concerned, he can neither destroy nor fulfil. And therefore those who like him obstruct the course of the Round Table Conference are like a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. To quote Lord Irwin's recent appeal, no more severe condemnation has ever been passed upon any person than that in which it was said of some that they entered not in themselves and them that were entering in, they hindered. And let us recollect :—

Whose will stake his lot
Impelled thereto by nescience or whim,
Cupidity or innocence or not,
On Chance's colours, let men pray for him !